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THE LEAVES OF THE TREE*

BY ARTHUR C. BENSON

VI—MATTHEW ARNOLD

IT is the hardest thing in the world to recover what one really thought or felt, or even knew, about great men or great books, when one was young. Subsequent knowledge and feeling have gone on trickling down, like stalactites from the roof of a cave, blending with and penetrating the original tiny core of experience. It is so impossible to shut off all the new light, which has since intervened, from the old picture! I cannot now disentangle what the essence of my genuine admiration for Matthew Arnold, in my school days, was. I did not know many of his poems. The "Forsaken Merman," which I learned by heart as a child, seemed to me rather silly and trivial, I am ashamed to say. I certainly had not read any of his prose works. But he was the son of Dr. Arnold, who was one of my father's heroes, and whose life I had read. In any case, I was prepared to see a great man when he came down to Eton to give his lecture on *εὐτραπεία*—versatility. It was going to be an event, and an event it was. I can remember the dignified suavity with which he took his place, the dark head, with its rippling glossy hair, sinuously and graciously inclined, the big side-whiskers, the large expressive mouth, the grave ecclesiastical smile. The opening sentence about the philosopher Epicetetus, and his complaint of the quality of the water in the bath, arrested me by its urbanity, its elaborateness; and by the sense that our instructor recognized himself to be, like the wise householder in the Gospel, bringing out of his treasury things new and old! I did not know what culture was in those days. I liked the books which amused me; I had no scheme of self-improvement, and not the smallest touch of ambition. But the whole discourse had the charm of a mysterious secret, of which our kindly and kingly lecturer

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had the dispensing. Something stirred and fluttered in my soul. This was not the hard and dull knowledge, like brick-bats, which fell from many of our teachers: it was not a taste of bitter and loathsome grammatical facts, which had no connection with each other or anything else; dreadful rules which had to be learned, in order to play the dreary game of education. There was something harmonious and seductive about what he was telling us, a sense of living men and living ideas—where language for a moment became, not the ashes of the human rubbish-heap, but coals glowing with the fire of the heart. I do not mean that I then and thus elaborated my thought; but it was a revelation of beautiful things within reach of one's hand—living ideas, glowing images.

I felt a sense of princely condescension and of active kindness about Mr. Arnold that he should be willing to instruct us. His utterance did not seem like persuasion, but a priestly sort of ministering of undoubted grace. The effect soon faded away; but it induced me, I remember, to read his poems, with an odd mixture of pleasure at the beauty of many of them, together with a sort of revulsion at the hard, plain, and knotty lines that lay among the richness, like the pointed kernel in the honeyed plum. One of my school-fellows was his nephew, and I secured an autograph, not indeed of the poet himself, but of his wife, which seemed to me a precious leaf from very near the rose.

Then, at Cambridge, I fell wholly under the spell of Matthew Arnold's writings, prose and poetry alike. He seemed to me the one faultless writer; and there came a day when he delivered the Bede Lecture, in the early eighties, and received an LL.D. degree. I was asked as an undergraduate to the great garden-party at King's, where the Doctors all appeared robed in glory; and while I was talking to the kindly Mrs. Westcott, wife of the Bishop, I suddenly descried two figures standing together and surveying the scene—Sir Henry Maine and Mr. Arnold. One little thing struck me. Most of the Doctors were wearing their scarlet gowns and their odd, flat, gold-corded velvet hats with an air of obvious and fearful joy. They had become, most of them, mere lay-figures, with a foolish smiling figurehead at the top, instinct with complacent vanity. But Maine and Arnold alone appeared to wear their gowns like customary coats, each as one

"That tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky."

There was no parade about it; they shone because it was their fate to shine. I murmured a heartfelt wish to Mrs. Westcott, who, with motherly kindness, went straight up to Mr. Arnold, I trailing in her wake, aghast at my boldness, and said, "Mr. Arnold, here is a young man who wishes to be presented to you. You know his father—the Bishop of Truro."

The moment was come. The great man held out his hand, said a few pleasant words about my father, and then, when I was about to retire, nodded to Sir Henry Maine, and said to me, "Come and walk about with me a little, and point out to me some of the celebrities." He even put his hand within my arm, and I had a few minutes of awe-struck rapture, parading before the guests in a kind of gorgeous intimacy with one of the first spirits of the age. I did my best to obey his instructions, and was at last dismissed with a delightful smile, and a wish that we should meet again.

We did meet again. My father became Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mr. Arnold used to dine with us at Lambeth; I have little doubt I bored him horribly, for I contrived more than once, when the ladies left the room, to slip into a chair beside him. But his graciousness was perfect. He treated me as he might have treated the most honored of our guests, and gave me of his best. My father had a real affection for him, not unmingled with terror. He considered him a dangerously subversive writer, but, I think, also thought of him as not likely to do serious harm to the cause of orthodoxy; while he loved his poetry so much and respected his sense of things ancient and beautiful so deeply that his admiration was wholly sincere. One interesting and characteristic story about him he was fond of telling. He had sat next him, on the first occasion of their meeting, at the house of Mr. Charles Arnold at Rugby. Matthew Arnold had uttered some humorous semi-cynical statement, to the effect that it was useless to try to enlighten the general public, or to give them a sense of due proportion. My father was somewhat nettled, and quoted a few lines from the celebrated sermon of Dr. Arnold's on Christian Education. Matthew Arnold smiled affectionately at him, drooping his head sideways in his direction, while he patted his shoulder, and said, "Very graceful and appropriate,

my dear Benson, but we must not take for Gospel everything that dear Dr. Arnold said."

It was incidents and sayings such as these—half-genial, half-ironical, and not really quite tactful—that gave Matthew Arnold the reputation for conscious superiority which the reality so instantly belied. It was only necessary to be once in his presence to know, with a certainty that could never be shaken, that he was the kindest, most amiable, and most delightful of men. He was simple, humorous, sweet-tempered, and natural. Yet the tradition persistently lingers that there was something supercilious and disdainful about him. Perhaps the tone of his writings, which have been described as "painfully kind," like a sage pleading graciously with a stubborn and stupid child, his magnificent manner, his dramatic eye-glass, may have created this impression. He was thought to be affected and academic. Probably, too, this view of him was augmented by Mr. Mallock's delightful satire, the *New Republic*, where Mr. Luke, who stands for Arnold, is depicted as languid, affected, and patronizing. Yet his letters alone, which are really almost too homely for preservation, might have disposed of this strange perversion. Even his liberal use of irony—that large, courteous, Socratic irony, which plays lambently over the type, and seldom scorches the individual—never made him unpopular; and in private life he was simply irresistible.

He was born in 1822 at Laleham, near Staines, in the great alluvial plain of the Thames. His father, Dr. Arnold, was then an unknown man, making an income by taking pupils. Two more diverse temperaments than those of father and son could hardly be selected. Dr. Arnold was earnest and strenuous, with the kind of passionate idealism that, while it inspires the enthusiastic with the same intense quality of emotion, is apt to take the heart out of more leisurely and easy-going natures. A man who could burst into tears at his own dinner-table on hearing a comparison made between St. Paul and St. John, to the detriment of the latter, and beg that the subject might never be mentioned again in his presence, could never have been an *easy* companion. Dr. Arnold was a hero of men: he had a Herculean task to perform, and he performed it with marvelous courage and industry. But such a spirit flies abroad like a flame, and withers where it does not ignite. It is impossible not

to feel that Dr. Arnold would have regarded his son's religious writings with shame and horror. And yet, strange to say, both father and son were attacking very much the same things and championing the same cause. Dr. Arnold hated tyranny, and had the true Protestant spirit. The son loved grace and light, and hated stupidity and conventional ineptitude. But the difficulty with such natures as Dr. Arnold's, with their intense capacity of translating theory into practical life, with their sharply defined principles, their ardor of hope, is that they cannot concede to others more liberty than they are themselves determined to possess. Dr. Arnold's liberalism was part of a very clear theory of government and practice. He did not wish others to be free on their own lines, but upon his own. He gave his boys liberty with a generous hand, but woe betide them if they extended that liberty; they had then, in Dr. Arnold's mind, abused it. Neither had Dr. Arnold a sense of humor. The ironical attitude, the half-pathetic, half-amused contemplation of perversities and stupidities, which you can perceive, but cannot terminate, was abhorrent to him. It was a kind of cynical trifling with the urgent issues of life. There is evidence that father and son did not wholly harmonize in the school days of the latter. But, if Dr. Arnold had lived to be an old man, it is difficult to say what would have ensued. Matthew Arnold's filial piety was so strong, he was so

"decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness,"

that he would have very possibly suppressed opinions the avowal of which would have caused his father unmitigated pain. But Dr. Arnold died in 1842, when his son was an undergraduate at Balliol, and the collision never came in sight.

Matthew Arnold's Oxford career was not an entire success. He only obtained a Second Class in the final Classical Schools. But this, as in the case of Newman and Clough, was more than atoned for by an Oriel Fellowship, which was still considered the highest intellectual honor that Oxford could bestow upon a young man of promise.

He went for a time to Rugby as a master, and then became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who was one of those quiet, imponderable personal forces in mid-Victorian politics to which history inevitably does scanty justice. Lord Lans-

downe led the House of Lords, and was consulted on every matter of political importance. He was a strong Whig, at a time when Whig opinions were still on the side of progress. Whiggery now seems a disagreeable blend of privilege and democracy, combining a convenient belief in popular liberty with a still stronger belief in personal prestige. Matthew Arnold's politics, nominally Liberal, were to the end influenced by the bias communicated to them by the serene dignity of his old chief. Yet the period of indoctrination was short enough. A political secretaryship is a fleeting thing; and within four years Matthew Arnold was appointed to an Inspectorship of Schools, a post which he held for thirty-five years.

It is natural, I think, to over-estimate the services which Matthew Arnold rendered to the cause of national education. He had, of course, a perception of the fact that if the democracy is to rule the State, the only hope is to educate the democracy up to its vote, and to give it an inkling of what political progress is. But his real concern lay with secondary education, and, though he was a kindly and sympathetic inspector, it is clear that his ideal of education was built upon the old humanistic basis. He overrated the force of classical culture, and he did not perceive that what, under earlier conditions, had been a real tincture of mental habit, was becoming, under modern conditions, a merely sentimental veneer. The modern function of education, in its civic aspect, is to initiate the youth of the country into clear conceptions of the possible reconstruction of political stability under democratic conditions. Matthew Arnold had a theoretical sympathy with the possibilities of scientific education, but his real sympathies lay with the attainment of literary culture. Hence he suffered from the inevitable backwardness of mind which befalls all those who can only meet actual difficulties, arising out of changed conditions, with a vaguely lyrical proffer of ancient complacencies. He was in favor of State supervision and publicity in education, but the result of his own and like-minded efforts was to establish a system of primary education which corresponds very little with the needs of the class educated; while secondary education, which was, and is, in urgent need of simplification and co-ordination, has been left in the hands of monopolists and traditional exponents of outworn theories. The secondary schools of England are still as much in need as ever of the qualities which Matthew

Arnold endeavored to enforce, while the effect of the type of primary education adopted has been to upset and subvert traditional class-feeling, without providing any social outlet for the type thus educated. It is useless to organize education without knowing very clearly what end is in sight. Matthew Arnold had little grasp of social eventualities. He knew clearly enough what attitude of mind he desired to produce, and still more clearly the middle-class attitude of mind that he abhorred; but he did not grasp the fact that education must be closely adapted to the material available, and that to achieve results it is even more important to know what instincts you have to act upon than what result you would desire to produce.

Matthew Arnold was made Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857, and held the post for ten years. His discourses were elegant and stimulating, but made no great mark on the literary history of the period. His official life lasted until 1886; but he found time to play a considerable part in the social life of his day. He was a welcome and honored guest in all societies; and in later life he made a lecturing tour in America, where his great ineffectiveness as a lecturer only emphasized the enthusiastic respect and admiration with which he was everywhere received.

The last time I ever saw him was in 1887, at Windermere Station. He appeared to be in the very flower and vigor of a strong and dignified age; but he died six months afterward, from the effects of hurrying to catch a tram-car in the streets of Liverpool, at the age of sixty-five. This swift and painless close to a life full of activity and social enjoyment was but the last of the felicities which attended him from birth to death.

As a literary critic Matthew Arnold was fanciful and even whimsical. But this is a small matter in face of his urbanity, his exquisite taste, and his delicacy of perception. He may be said to have inaugurated, or at all events to have given prestige to, a new school of criticism. The old-fashioned *sangrenu* theory of criticism—the criticism of Lord Macaulay and the Edinburgh Reviewers—is slowly, it may thankfully be believed, dying a natural death. There were two modes of criticism extant in the earlier part of the century, and it is hard to say which is the more futile. The benevolent critic classified authors, and placed them in lists, like Tripos lists, in classes and brackets; authors

had to be compared and pitted one against another. If poetry was in question, another class-list was brought out, say of elegies: " Lycidas " came out first, Gray's " Elegy " second, and so on. The stricter method was to sit in judgment, and to pronounce what was right and what was wrong. The critic was a judge, and authors were arraigned before him. If an author was approved, he was acquitted without a stain on his character; if he was disapproved of, he was taken to task as a nuisance to society, and received a harsh and ignominious sentence, with every sort of wounding ridicule that could be heaped upon him. It was an attempt, a conscientious and complacent attempt, to establish standards; but it overlooked the fact that criticism is ultimately based upon individual opinion, and that opinion shifts its channels. The most that one can say is that, if a book approves itself to generation after generation, and satisfies both trained and untrained opinion, it probably has some quality which corresponds to an instinctive sense of beauty in the human mind. But there is no scientific standard instantly applicable in the case of contemporary work. Dr. Johnson was a shrewd and perceptive judge of certain qualities in literature, but the fact that he thought the *Pilgrim's Progress* a stupid and barbarous book does not make Johnson a bad critic or the *Pilgrim's Progress* a bad book. All that the most acute critic can do is to discern qualities in a writer that are likely to prove congenial to cultivated minds and hearts. It is the same with natural objects. One cannot say that the Matterhorn is a beautiful mountain and Monte Rosa an ugly mountain. What one can do is to perceive that the Matterhorn has certain arresting qualities, which for some unknown reason are likely to continue to appeal to the human imagination. When one comes to individual books, it is no more possible to explain why one is beautiful than to explain why human beings like mutton and do not care for horseflesh. All writers, all books, all poems are unique; and it seems gradually dawning upon men that the true function of criticism is only that of discerning and interpreting excellence, and that the only comparison worth making is the comparison between a writer's intention and his performance.

Matthew Arnold had strong preferences of his own. He did not care for Shakespeare, Tennyson, Shelley, Keats, or Thackeray. On the other hand, he had a taste for discover-

ing, and for praising almost extravagantly, little literary figures of no great significance. Amiel, Joubert, the two Guérins, were figures on whom Matthew Arnold conferred a prominence which they did not wholly retain. He liked a subtle and suggestive kind of moralizing; he sympathized with a melancholy outlook on the world. But in so far as he saw and felt the charm of these writers, and made others feel it, he discharged the true critical function. After all, the victory rests with the man who sees and feels beauty, not with the man who is unaware of it. The Guérins, in their slender way, were as beautiful as the purple toadflax on the crannied wall. They were not beautiful as the Matterhorn is beautiful; but they had a delicate quality of their own, and were perfect on a small scale. People who are touched and satisfied by the toadflax need not be scolded for not admiring the Matterhorn. It is more important to realize quality than to reverence scale. The critic who appraises is only a sort of auctioneer. The true critic is one who takes a theme, whether it be Maurice de Guérin or Shakespeare; sees its delicate outlines or its majestic curves, its sweetness or its majesty, its connection with life and death, its truth and its sincerity; and on this theme, large or small, soft or loud, he must create something organic, that in itself is a criticism of life.

There may, of course, be people who think it valuable and instructive, and even interesting, to have books marked and classified; and, if there is a demand, there is no sort of reason why literary salesmen should not discourse in public on these lines. But Matthew Arnold was not a critic in that sense, and he was a critic in the larger sense—in that he had his eye on life and his finger on the pulse of humanity—and thus set himself to criticize the strange fruit of human utterance, which is both a part of life itself, as well as its expression and reflection.

He was a critic in his seriousness, his disinterestedness, his desire to get at the meaning and essence of it all. He had a finely trained intelligence working on systematic lines. His great maxim in criticism was this: "I wish to decide nothing as of my own authority: the great art of criticism is to get oneself out of the way, and to let humanity decide. There he struck a very true note. The critic is a pleader, not a judge, and still less the epitome of a jury. His business is to present the case truthfully and lucidly, but the ultimate decision lies elsewhere. Arnold struck a true note in his book, *Culture*

and *Anarchy*, in which his point was to prove that lawlessness in art was the lack of proper deference to the authority of the cultivated persons; but even so, no deference to the individual critic can be demanded, because the individual cannot wholly discard his own preferences. Deference is due to a slowly accumulated body of cultivated opinion; and even when one has said that, one is little better off than before, because the only admiration that is worth anything is genuine admiration, and the admiration which is the result of deference to opinion is a perfectly valueless thing. What deference ought to make men do is to give literature a fair trial, and not to decide hastily; and if one disagrees with the verdict of the ages, to conclude that it is probably oneself that is deficient, and not that the ages had no right to their opinion.

A critic who did not agree with Matthew Arnold's judgments spoke acrimoniously of Arnold's belief in the well-known preference of the Almighty for University men. The criticism was not wholly undeserved. Behind Arnold's deliberate and instinctive urbanity there lurked a well-bred contempt for the mob—for all that was loud and violent and brutal and rude. But this was not the impotent rage manifested by weakness for good-humored strength, as by Miss Squeers for John Brodie, which is too often the attitude of the literary man. Arnold regarded the uncultivated as the lost sheep of the House of Israel. What he really did openly despise and dislike was the gross, robust, and complacent self-satisfaction of the middle-class—the Philistines, as he christened them—who despised ideas because they thought they had secured what was better worth having—a measure of material comfort. But the irony in which he indulged at their expense never made him unpopular, because he attacked, as a rule, the type, and not the individual; and when he did attack the individual, he seasoned his contempt with a deferential consciousness of his adversary's strength, and with diplomatic compliments. Even his ridicule was of a kind which ministered agreeably to his victims' vanity—to such an extent indeed that it rather confirmed them in a perversity which seemed so distinguished, than induced them to wish to alter their methods and opinions.

Arnold was thus not an appraiser of literary values, but a critic in the sense that he heightened and dignified the interest and the appreciation of art and literature; and a critic, in the larger sense, of his age, in the fact that he saw clearly

its strength and its weakness, and held up his flattering mirror to its smug and comfortable visage. Perhaps his best service of all was to show that a critic can be well-bred and urbane, and that he thus does far more for the cause that he has at heart than when his native irritability throws out malignant sparks at its contact with life, or when he vindictively punches to pieces some of the helpless and grotesque vermin of letters, in the spirit of the gardener who hewed the toad to bits, like Agag, saying that he would teach it to be a toad.

It is difficult to estimate what the precise effect of Matthew Arnold's religious opinions upon contemporary thought exactly was. He was in no sense a pioneer; he rather focussed a great amount of floating opinion, and expressed with grace, force, and simplicity what a good many cultivated people were thinking. "I *thrive* on religious exegesis," he once said to a friend who inquired after his health. His religion was a literary Pantheism, with a strong tinge of Christian Idealism. He could not accept as proved the doctrine of a Personal Divinity. Unfortunately, with his relish for phrases, he invented a new and extremely unattractive formula for a very simple idea. "The Eternal not-ourselves which makes for righteousness" was in its way a formula as disagreeably definite to agnostics as the technical statements of the Athanasian Creed, without the advantage either of the familiarity which leads simple people to overlook the precise significance of clauses which have become habitual, or of the venerable and emotional associations which gather round expressions that have been consecrated by religious solemnity. The ordinary man does not want to think of the Divine principle as a sort of electricity, of which the untamed manifestations are disastrous and the subdued uses beneficial, but all the workings of which are blind and mechanical. If the mysterious force behind the frame of things has anything so definite in view as right conduct, the human mind is more than justified in using a concrete symbolism, for the simple reason that it cannot think in abstractions. A human being, with its intense consciousness of what it means by the word "self," can hardly be trained to think of that self as being originated by any power which is not also personal. Indeed, the evolution of consciousness from unconsciousness is an unattainable thought. Our intense sense of our right to happiness inevitably leads us to interpret the events of life as being framed to develop that happiness, and our natural

optimism triumphs over unhappiness, by imagining that the disasters of life must somehow be intended to minister to ultimate content. Thus, on the constructive side, Matthew Arnold's theory must be held to have failed, because it provides no medicine for discontent and despair. If there is only a passionless force making for righteousness, if no alliance of the human will with that force is possible, then, however true the theory may be, there is no reason for attempting passionately to embrace it. It can have no value for humanity till it is proved to be true; and if it is proved to be true, it is a very discouraging business.

But where Arnold undoubtedly did help his generation was by showing thoughtful minds that they need not necessarily abandon Christian principles and Christian hopes because they could not believe whole-heartedly in ecclesiastical title-deeds. The modern critical position with regard to the miraculous element of Scripture is not that it is necessarily untrue, but that it needs more proof than the records can possibly furnish.

Matthew Arnold's view of Christ was very much what his view would have been of St. Francis of Assisi. Any one who reads the "Fioretti" of St. Francis must feel perfectly sure that there is a real human being behind the record. But when the narrator says that St. Francis's head threw out flames as he prayed, and that, when an inquisitive Brother came nearer to observe the phenomenon closely, St. Francis turned round and blew him with a breath to the other end of the room, no one can be compelled to believe the statement, or to give up his belief in the actuality of St. Francis if he disbelieves it. The obvious *bona fides*, the naïve simplicity of the "Fioretti," do not necessitate one's adherence to the belief that St. Francis reduced by a scolding the cannibal wolf of Gubbio into an affectionate kind of lap-dog. That did not seem impossible in an unscientific age. The real marvel would have been if St. Francis's recorded life had been unattended with such reported occurrences. Of course, the difficulty is where to draw the line, but the difficulty is more theoretical than practical. Matthew Arnold's view was that in the Gospel we have the history of a character of supreme moral insight and transcendent spiritual force, and that the great and noble principles of life uttered by Jesus of Nazareth could never lose their indisputable power and truth. It was, no doubt, an intense relief to many thoughtful minds to

find a man of high enthusiasm and stainless life saying frankly that no one need trouble his head about the legendary element of the Gospels, but also affirming that, on the other hand, the sayings of Christ afforded a final and ultimate standard of conduct and impulse. The mistake, he thought, was to try to deduce an ontological and dogmatic explanation of the world from sayings which combined the noblest kind of enthusiasm with the clearest perception of both moral beauty and truth. It is probable that Matthew Arnold, by saying with matchless lucidity and courage what many sincere but bewildered people were thinking, did retain in sympathy with religious ideas a great many desirous souls who had felt themselves confronted by the choice between ecclesiastical dogma and scientific materialism. He induced many semi-thoughtful people to regard the Bible with increased reverence and respect, as an inspiring manual of conduct, instead of abandoning it as an intolerable enigma. It is not, perhaps, a very living message now, because the type of persons to whom he gave consolation have moved into a different region, and are more interested now in problems of social reconstruction. Religious dogma has become a matter which mainly concerns denominational coteries; the words "heresy" and "schism" have lost their sinister consequences, and the tendency is rather to emphasize points of agreement than to ostracize points of dissidence. Indeed, it is almost impossible to reconstruct, even in imagination, the susceptibilities which broke out into flame over *Essays and Reviews*. And it may be said generally that Matthew Arnold helped his generation in the direction of clearness of thought, of facing problems sincerely and without irritability, and away from the peculiarly ecclesiastical product which confuses muddle with mystery, and supposes that the blessing given by the Saviour to Thomas was a blessing on credulity, rather than a tender warning against materialistic self-sufficiency.

The books which people write are interesting, I believe, in so far as they represent their tastes rather than their ambitions. The latter books have generally some pretentious emphasis, which is of rhetoric, not of nature, or some subtle suppression of opinion which makes the fabric insecure. The weakness of such books is that they are written to impress the world; and people who desire to impress the world generally judge it harshly or meanly, perhaps because they sus-

pect that their triumph implies the world's gullibility. Few poets, God be praised, have ever written in that spirit, even though they may yield to complacency afterward. Matthew Arnold's poems were certainly not written from that point of view. He published both his first volumes, *The Strayed Reveller* (1849) and *Empedocles on Etna* (1852) under the single initial "A." Both books fell so flat that they were withdrawn from circulation after a few copies had been sold. If he had lived entirely for ambition, that would have been a sharp lesson. I do not intend here to give a critical appreciation of the poems, except in so far as they illustrate character. They made no appeal to popular ears. They are intensely cultured, and have a certain Miltonic stiffness and bareness, in many lines, which require for their apprehension that a reader's taste should have been curbed and enriched by classical training. He made some experiments, notably in a sort of rhythmical prose, with a pulse of meter beating throughout. That it was not wholly successful is perhaps proved by the fact that it has had no imitators, except Mr. Mallock, who, in the *New Republic*, produced a similar poem which, if it had been a genuine work of the poet's, would have been faithfully, and rightly, accepted as a fine poem of the kind. Matthew Arnold wasted time, it may be whispered, in writing a play, "Balder Dead," where much emotion and high poetry are expended on a subject which never seems quite to burst into flame. He wrote a very noble narrative fragment, "Sohrab and Rustum," which is a splendid specimen of the self-conscious and elaborate epic, and touches the springs of life. Perhaps his best work was done in iambic and stanzaic lyrics, mostly of a gnomic type, full of finely crystallized maxims; while the romantic poem of the "Scholar-Gypsy" and the monody "Thyrsis," on the death of Clough, have taken rank among the great poems of the century. But the poems, as a whole, illustrate a melancholy habit of mind. Occasionally there are hints of a mournful passion, not sensuous, but spiritual, which seems held in check by a certain timidity and coldness of nature which dares not let itself go. The impression they give is that of a mind ill at ease, with an intense love of beauty, a desire for heightened living and zest, struggling with a nature which is hardly robust enough to live as it longs to live. Here, one says, is a spirit that feels the weariness more than the joy of life, and that checks itself again and again

on the threshold of experience, trying to school itself into tranquillity and philosophical peace.

The hand that wrote

“Calm’s not life’s crown, though calm is well,”

must have been that of a man who felt that through some deficiency of vital force he could not afford to gratify his desires, and that his only chance of peace was to accept what he knew to be only second-best—namely, life on a lower plane, husbanded and guarded so that its resources may not be squandered. It is a nature which dreads the fight and the struggle, the elements which to coarser and stronger spirits, who do not trouble themselves about the wounds which they inflict, add zest to the things for which they fight. But there is a nobler quality than that in the background. The nature behind the poems is pre-eminently just, high-minded, and affectionate, born out of due time into a world which is still very far even from its conscious possibilities. The poems reflect an intense love of the earth—not the wild untamed earth of peak and forest, but the earth as subdued and replenished by man. The morality they teach is high and austere. Life is a pilgrimage of which the end is uncertain. There are beautiful things by the way, which the pilgrim sees with hungry heart and tears unsealed; and perhaps some kindly power hangs out signs of love and hope in wayside flowers and forest-aisles. But life, it would seem, must be a constant renunciation, with no hope of immediate reward. Not that men should wilfully abide in sadness—there is work to be done, there are tasks to be performed. If one desires to get the strongest possible contrast to Matthew Arnold, one may consider the poems of his contemporary, William Morris. Both men had the same intense love of man’s handiwork. But Morris is full of the joy of life and work, while Arnold gazes mournfully on a life which it is impossible to enjoy, and work which it is unmanly to avoid.

Perhaps one gets nearest to Matthew Arnold’s thought in the solemn reflectiveness of *Empedocles on Etna*, where the contrast is heightened by the boy’s voice breaking in, like the song of the wayside bird. But to the soul-wearied tortured philosopher, planning a grave flight from a world in which it seems impossible to live wisely and calmly, all that radiant and careless joy is but one of the pathetic fetters which pinion the soul, and which must sternly be broken through.

The poems all belong to a period of unrest. Life had in store for Matthew Arnold a fuller message. He was to live and thrive, without ever drifting into comfortable materialism. He was to enrich the world by his gentle irony, his temperate example, his unsuspecting candor, and by the sweet reasonableness which he practised as well as preached. But the poetical impulse left him, not probably because he was busy, but because, as has befallen even the most otiose of poets, the nerves of perception and lyrical expression get dulled by the mere act of living; it becomes not worth while to express in dancing and tinkling measures such very temperate raptures! And so he sank, not into silence indeed, but into the congenial task of pleading more prosaically and directly, with an unreasonable world.

When one comes to survey the life and character of Matthew Arnold, one is struck at once by the curious set of contrasts which it displays. His grand manner, his social brilliance, his love of appearances and high consideration, do not seem to correspond to the extreme homeliness of his letters, which are, perhaps, the tamest documents—for all their goodness and kindness—ever penned by a man of genius: they are so much concerned with the details of life, with the food he ate, the names of the people he met, his trivial adventures, that, taken by themselves, one might imagine them to be the work of a capable, kindly, and intelligent commercial traveler. There is no enthusiasm, no discontent, and an almost total absence of ideas about them. But at least his extreme and deep-seated modesty comes out. He speaks in one passage of the fact that is borne in upon him every year that he lives—that success as a writer is far more a matter of good fortune than genius, surrounded, as every writer is, by hosts of intelligent and capable people, all aiming at the same sort of success. That is a very wise and mellow maxim; but it is the last thing that a casual stranger meeting Matthew Arnold, in all his princely condescension, would have credited him with feeling. Then, too, behind this easy and distinguished life, there looks out from the poems the eager, dissatisfied, unhappy spirit, only craving for peace, and unable by any device to compass it. Yet, looking at the facts, even his overwhelming sorrows—his three sons died in boyhood—seem to have been gently borne. It is difficult to bring all these strands together. There appears at first sight a duality of disposition, a nature that

agonized in the deeps of thought, and a nature that could live easily and cheerfully in daily life. My own belief is that he was one of those rare spirits who had really disciplined his life into patience and acquiescence out of feverish discontent and limitless dreams. He had realized, as all poets do not realize, that, apart from visions and reveries, there is a very real and simple life of duty and family ties and intellectual enterprise that must be courageously and genially dealt with. He had a very noble and simple nature, incapable of meanness, or suspicion, or resentment. He found, I believe, that the one certain way to misunderstand humanity is by intellectually despising it, and that the life of the mind, prospective as it must be, must not be allowed to interfere with the present and urgent life of the heart. He was not, I think, a sagacious political prophet. The refined Whiggery, which he picked up under Lord Lansdowne, obscured his view, while the constitution of his mind made him incapable of recognizing or sympathizing with the rough and vivid hopes of democracy. His political judgments are, indeed, quite singularly inept. Neither had he any constructive social power. His educational ideals are pedantic and bureaucratic; but he had a real love of his fellow-men and a great tolerance for their weaknesses. If they did not flock into his intellectual fold, he yet was a friend of liberty, and struck some shrewd blows at stupidity, complacency, commercial religion, and vulgarity. And when he was swiftly summoned from the life he loved so well, the world lost not a warrior or a prophet, but a man who had lived faithfully and guilelessly, a wise and tender critic who had held up a faithful mirror to the faults of his time, and had done much to interpret and enforce the beauty and significance of thought and emotion and uplifted life. In one of his poems he says that *esteem* and *function* are the only merits which death allows. And these he had indeed, when his body was laid to rest, of purest quality and in fullest measure.

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